

Fallen Kilmun nurse remembered as a true hero and committed servant of the people

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A COMMITTED, extra-ordinary male nurse; an unsung hero who gave his all to provide healthcare for his rural community before his life was cut short by illness. That is how Sir Sifiso Emphrain Mbambo, who passed away on 14 July 2017, aged 37, was remembered during a memorial lecture held in his honour at Kilmun near Bulwer yesterday.

Delivering the memorial lecture, KZN Health MEC Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo described Mbambo, who worked at Kilmun Clinic, as a champion of Primary Healthcare, who was centred in the community. He recalled numerous remarkable anecdotes about Mbambo. "He would put aside his qualifications and walk long distances on foot to get to the people. He managed to do so many remarkable things during his short life, it was as if he knew that he would not be around for a long time. And he never did it for fame.

One of the first people to be trained in government's Nurse-Initiated Management of Anti-Retriviral Therapy (NIMART) programme, Mbambo's many proud achievements included the formation of a Taxi Rank Club, with the assistance of a taxi rank manager, which brought health services to taxi operators. This was after he had learned that three taxi drivers had passed away because they could not access treatment from the hospital due to their busy schedule. Ultimately, the support group had 60 members – all virally suppressed (with an undetectable HIV viral load).



The late Sifiso Emphrain

Mbambo

Once, when a hospital vehicle broke down, Mbambo carried a box of antiretroviral treatment on his head and walked a long distance to deliver it to a group of taxi drivers to ensure that they did not default on their treatment..

MEC Dhlomo said Mbambo's selfless contribution to the provision of healthcare and social welfare challenges all

healthcare practitioners to emulate him.

Mbambo also:

- Assisted his community with application letters for SASSA Grants through an agreement he had with the agency, his signature was the only one authorized to do so;
- As a chairperson of the Adolescent and Youth Friendly Services, he started off by helping school children with their homework after hours, while others would use his cellphone to access the internet;
- He went as far as approaching the principal in Ralph Hardingham High School, asking for a slot in their timetable to help educate the learners on issues affecting the youth. He was granted the Life Orientation lesson as his slot.
- He also secured sponsorships for the youth's sports uniform; netball, soccer, volleyball, tables and chairs for the children's play area in the facility. Mbambo even made a lasting impression on the memory of the principal of Skofill High School, who had this to say about him:

“He came to our school one day accompanied by Sister Mgobhozi and requested that we create a working relationship, that would benefit both the school and the clinic. “He announced that the staff members would receive early attention when they come to the clinic so that they can return to work and attend to learners.



KZN Health MEC Dr

Sibongiseni Dhlomo and family of late Sifiso Emphrain Mbambo

He requested that learners be released only after midday to attend the clinic if it was not a life-threatening illness as he was concerned that they were using the clinic not to attend school. He re-enforced the utilization of permission slips for learners attending the clinics. In 2016, he joined the School Safety Committee, bringing along all the good ideas towards safety strategies to the school.

He organized the first supply of sanitary pads, even before the Department of Education did. 95% of our male learners went for circumcision through his encouragement. He re-built connection and dependency between the clinic and the community.”

MEC Dhlomo said Mbambo would come to the Taxi Rank on a regular basis in the morning for health education, sputum collection and HIV testing.

“People in the taxi industry say he was kind, easily approachable and caring. They say that while you would expect that a person of his calibre would treat taxi drivers differently, he treated them as family. “They say he was down to earth, in a way that when he asked you for something it became difficult to say no.”

Quoting a taxi operator, MEC Dhlomo said: “He approached us asking the drivers to avail a taxi to go and collect people from the clinic at lunchtime because transport was a problem. Normally our taxis have a time schedule which is 7h00 to 11h00; however when Sir Mbambo asked us to be available by the clinic gate at 13h00 we never had a problem. He was a great person to work with. He was able to get to our level as drivers, sharing with us his personal stories, life lessons while encouraging us to do better and further our studies.”

Sir Sifiso Ephraim Mbambo was born on the 19th of September 1980, at Songonzima location in Elandskop. He pursued his tertiary education at Grey’s Hospital Nursing College from 2002 to 2007 and obtained Diploma in nursing (General Psychiatric and community) and Midwifery.

In 2011 he obtained a Diploma in Nursing Science Health Assessment treatment and care from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

In the same year, he did a course in Nurse-Initiated Management of Anti-Retroviral Therapy (NIMART) at University of Cape Town.

In 2013, Sir Mbambo obtained a certificate in Paediatric HIV/TB care and treatment at University of Stellenbosch.

“He left an indelible mark in our lives. His was a God-given talent and a calling to help others. He was diligent in such a way that it was if he had known that he would not live for long. People always had compliments to give about him. If we could do half the things he did, ours would be a better country. As people in the healthcare profession, we have a challenge to understand that this is a Godly task. It affects people lives and those of their families,” said MEC Dhlomo.